

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BRASIL 10655 01 OF 03 031029Z
ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 FRB-03
 INR-07 NSAE-00 USIA-06 TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03 SP-02
 CIEP-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 L-03 H-01 NSC-05 SS-15
 STR-04 CEA-01 PA-01 PRS-01 OES-06 INT-05 FEA-01
 ERDA-05 /101 W
 -----031049Z 053832 /17

P R 302300Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9382
INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY MEXICO CITY
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWNQ
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 BRASILIA 10655

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ECON, PINT, BR
SUBJ: PRESIDENT GEISEL'S YEAR-END ADDRESS TO THE NATION

REF: 75 BRASILIA 11073

1. SUMMARY. PRESIDENT GEISEL'S YEAR-END ADDRESS TO THE NATION
CALLED ON BRAZILIANS TO SUPPORT THEIR GOVERNMENT THROUGH THE
ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES AHEAD. THE SPEECH REVIEWED ECONOMIC DE-
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PAGE 02 BRASIL 10655 01 OF 03 031029Z

VELOPMENTS AND POLICIES IN THE NEARLY THREE YEARS OF THE GEISEL
ADMINISTRATION -- IN AN APPARENT ATTEMPT TO SHOW THAT HIS
GOVERNMENT HAD ANTICIPATED DIFFICULTIES, ALTHOUGH IT HAD NOT
ALWAYS CORRECTED THEM QUICKLY BECAUSE ONLY CRUDE POLICY INSTRU-
MENTS WERE AVAILABLE. GEISEL BLAMED EXTERNAL DIFFICULTIES AS WELL.
HE POINTED TO THE ECONOMIC PROGRESS THAT HAS BEEN MADE IN

CERTAIN AREAS. HE EXPRESSED HIS BELIEF THAT, ALTHOUGH THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IS SERIOUS, BRAZIL COULD OVERCOME THE DIFFICULTIES AHEAD. REGARDING THE NOV. 15 ELECTIONS, HE SAID THEY REPRESENTED "A CLEAR AND UNQUESTIONABLE EXPRESSION" BY THE MAJORITY OF BRAZILIANS IN FAVOR OF HIS GOVERNMENT. GEISEL'S SPEECH, IN OUR JUDGEMENT WAS PEDESTRIAN AND CONTAINED NO NEW IDEAS OR POLICIES. DESPITE GEISEL'S ALLUSIONS TO THE CONTRARY, THE GOVERNMENT'S OWN MISMANAGEMENT CAUSED MANY ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. END SUMMARY BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

2. BRAZIL'S FOURTH REVOLUTIONARY PRESIDENT, GENERAL-OF-THE ARMY (RET.) ERNESTO GEISEL, DEVOTED MOST OF HIS THIRD YEAR-END ADDRESS TO THE NATION TO ECONOMIC QUESTION. HE REVIEWED AT GREAT LENGTH HIS ECONOMIC COMMENTS IN PREVIOUS ADDRESSES. IN EARLY 1974, HE HAD RECOGNIZED THE "VALUABLE HERITAGE OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE REVOLUTION," BRAZIL'S "POSITION OF PROMINENCE ON THE ROSTER OF NEW EMERGING POWERS" AND THE "GREAT DYNAMISM OF THE ECONOMY... THE BEST INDICATORS OF PROSPERITY IN THE HISTORY OF THE COUNTRY."

3. EVEN THEN, HOWEVER, HE HAD PERCEIVED THE "DRASTIC CHANGES" IN THE WORLD ECONOMY, AND HAD CONCLUDED IN SEPTEMBER 1974 THAT THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR "EXAGGERATED OPTIMISM". THE EXTREMES OF EUPHORIA AND DEFEATIST PESSIMISM WERE AVOIDED, AND HE HAD SOUGHT TO REMAIN SERENE, REALISTIC, AND FLEXIBLY VIGILANT.

4. ALTHOUGH BRAZIL FOR MANY MONTHS MAINTAINED ITSELF "IMMUNE" FROM EXTERNAL "PRESSURES" AND CONTINUED ITS EXCEPTIONAL RATES
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PAGE 03 BRASIL 10655 01 OF 03 031029Z

OF ECONOMIC GROWTH, THE GOVERNMENT, IN THE FACE OF INFLATION AND THE AGGRAVATED ECONOMIC OUTLOOK HAD RECOGNIZED THAT THE ECONOMY HAD TO BE ADJUSTED TO INTERNATIONAL REALITY. THE GOVERNMENT STIMULATED THE ECONOMY THROUGH CREDIT ALLOCATIONS AND MASSIVE INVESTMENTS IN PRIORITY SECTORS, AND THROUGH A DELIBERATE INCREASE IN THE "EXCESSIVELY LOW" PURCHASING POWER OF THE "GREAT MAJORITY OF THE CONSUMING POPULATION".

5. GEISEL POINTED TO THE INEVITABLE EVOLUTION OF ECONOMIC PHASES OR "MINICYCLES", AND TO THE PRESENCE OF THE SAME MARKET MODEL, IN WHICH: (A) THE STATE-OWNED NUCLEUS, BY ITS SIZE AND DOMINANCE IN STRATEGIC SECTORS, CONSTITUTES THE ECONOMY'S PRINCIPAL PROPULSIVE FORCE, AND (B) STATE INTERVENTION IS UNDERTAKEN IN DEFENSE OF THE COMMON GOOD AND IN FAVOR OF EACH CITIZEN AND OF SOCIETY AS A WHOLE. GEISEL BLAMED INSUFFICIENTLY SENSITIVE ECONOMIC INDICATORS AND THE AVAILABILITY OF ONLY CRUDE POLICY INSTRUMENTS, FOR PREVENTING THE EXECUTION OF ECONOMIC POLICIES THAT ARE

GRADUATED IN IMPACT AND THAT BRING A SATISFACTORILY RAPID RESPONSE.

6. TURNING TO 1975, GEISEL SAID THE DECELERATION STILL PERMITTED POSITIVE PER CAPITA INCOME GROWTH. THERE WAS NO ABNORMAL UNEMPLOYMENT, A SMALL DECREASE IN INFLATION, AND AN AVOIDANCE OF PAINFUL SHOCKS TO PRIVATE COMPANIES. THIS BROUGHT A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF JUSTIFIABLE SATISFACTION AND SHOWED THAT THE GOVERNMENT KNEW HOW TO RESIST " 'PREMATURE REACTIONS OF PANIC.' "

9. THE YEAR 1976 STARTED ON A NOTE OF OPTIMISM, GEISEL SAID, EVEN THOUGH IT WAS EXPECTED TO BE A DIFFICULT YEAR. AS IT TURNED OUT, A RECESSION WAS AVOIDED IN 1976, BUT GROWTH WAS MUCH HIGHER THAN DESIRED. FOR EXAMPLE, FROM JANUARY THROUGH NOVEMBER THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR EXPANDED BY 10 - 11 PERCENT (COMMENT: VERSUS THE SAME PERIOD IN 1975). FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES, CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 BRASIL 10655 01 OF 03 031029Z

WHICH IN MID-YEAR HAD FALLEN TO THEIR LOWEST LEVEL, DOLS 3.3 BILLION, HAVE NOW SURPASSED DOLS 5.3 BILLION, A LEVEL GREATER THAN AT THE END OF 1974. GEISEL SAID THE TRADE DEFICIT, STILL HIGH (ABOUT DOLS 2.3 BILLION), IS MUCH LESS THAN THE DOLS 4.6 BILLION DEFICIT OF 1974 AND THE DOLS 3.5 BILLION DEFICIT OF 1975. EXPORTS THIS YEAR HAVE GROWN AT A HIGH RATE (16 PERCENT) WHILE IMPORTS (IN VALUE TERMS) REMAIN CLOSE TO THE LEVEL OF 1975. THE FINANCIAL "EXERCISE" ENDED UP "EQUILIBRATED". THE LEVEL OF EMPLOYMENT INCREASED.

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PAGE 01 BRASIL 10655 02 OF 03 031039Z
ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 FRB-03
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ERDA-05 /101 W

-----031050Z 053873 /17

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 BRASILIA 10655

10. GEISEL TURNED TO THE DRAWBACKS: "THE YEAR WAS NOT, HOWEVER, TRANQUIL." THE EXPANSION OF CREDIT AT THE END OF 1975, THE ADVERSE CLIMATIC CONDITIONS WHICH RAISED AGRICULTURAL WHOLESALE PRICES BY 70 PERCENT, THE AGITATION OF THE OPEN MARKET, THE STIMULUS OF NEW DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS GAVE TO INFLATION, AND THE "JUST AND UNPOSTPONABLE" WAGE AND SALARY READJUSTMENTS, ALL REINFORCED INFLATIONARY IMPULSES, GEISEL OBSERVED. THE "OVERHEATED" ECONOMY PRESSURED IMPORT DEMAND AND
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 BRASIL 10655 02 OF 03 031039Z

RAISED INFLATION. THE PERSISTENCE OF GROWTH IN EXCESS OF RESOURCES, GEISEL JUDGED, CAN RESULT LATER IN "EXTREMELY PAINFUL ADJUSTMENTS, INVOLVING THE RISK OF SERIOUS DISTORTIONS AND RUINOUS "INJURIES".

11. THE NEED TO CONTAIN INFLATION, THE BALANCE-OF-PAYMENTS, AND FOREIGN DEBT, GEISEL SAID, REQUIRED PROMPT MEASURES. THUS AT MID-YEAR THE GOVERNMENT TOOK SEVERAL MEASURES OF CONTENTION, ABOVE ALL IN THE MONETARY AREA. THE FIRST IMPACT, GEISEL OBSERVED, WAS THE RECOVERY IN FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES, WHICH WAS "VERY FAVORABLE" TO BRAZIL'S EXTERNAL CREDIBILITY. LAGS IN THE EFFECTS OF THESE POLICIES PERMITTED INFLATION TO FALL ONLY IN THE FOURTH QUARTER.

12. WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE UNFORESEEN STAGNATION TENDENCY IN THE "PROPULSIVE ECONOMIES OF THE WESTERN WORLD, PARTICULARLY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA," THE PROSPECTS FOR 1977 ARE "NOT PROMISING". GEISEL

SAID "WE WILL PROCEED WITH THE AIM, ABOVE ALL, OF MAKING OUR ECONOMIC STRUCTURE LESS VULNERABLE TO UNFAVORABLE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FOREIGN ECONOMIC PICTURE WHICH AGAIN COME TO "THREATEN" US.

13. ON PETROLEUM, GEISEL SAID THE RECENT INCREASE BROUGHT PRICES TO "EXCESSIVELY HIGH LEVELS FOR US", AND HE OBSERVED THAT THE WORLD ECONOMY STILL HAD NOT ADJUSTED TO THE "BRUSQUE SHOCK" OF 1973. CITING THE NEED TO AVOID WASTING FUEL, WHICH HAS BECOME "CRIMINAL", GEISEL SAID THE GOVERNMENT IS STUDYING DELIBERATELY THE POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES.

14. REGARDING ECONOMIC POLICY FOR 1977, GEISEL SAID FINAL WORK IS BEING DONE ON THE LINES OF DIRECTION AND PRIORITY. THE "MASTER IDEA" STILL IS THE SAME; -- EXPANSION AND DIVERSIFICATION OF EXPORT PRODUCTS AND MARKETS, AND IMPORT

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PAGE 03 BRASIL 10655 02 OF 03 031039Z

SUBSTITUTION IN SECTORS PRODUCING BASIC INPUTS, INCLUDING ENERGY. TACTICS WILL BE CENTERED ON AN ECONOMIC DECELERATION THAT WILL CONTINUE TO SPARE THE COUNTRY FROM DEPRESSION AND UNEMPLOYMENT.

15. "I AM CERTAIN", GEISEL SAID IN CLOSING THE ECONOMIC PORTION OF HIS ADDRESS, "THAT THE PEOPLE WILL UNDERSTAND THE NECESSITY "OF RIGOROUS AND UNCOMFORTABLE MEASURES" AND "WILL RENDER ALL THEIR SUPPORT" TO A GOVERNMENT THAT NEITHER ASKS FOR "UNNECESSARY SACRIFICES NOR IMPOSES A BURDEN WHICH UNDERMINES EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE".

16. REGARDING INTERNAL POLITICAL SUBJECTS, GEISEL NOTED THE NOVEMBER 15 ELECTIONS HAD BEEN CARRIED OUT IN A CLIMATE OF ORDER AND SECURITY, AND ABSTENTIONS WERE MUCH LOWER THAN IN COUNTRIES WITH A MORE DEVELOPED POLITICAL SYSTEM (READ THE US). THE CITED POSITIVE EFFECT OF LEI FALCAO, WHICH EQUALIZED CANDIDATES' ABILITIES TO REACH THE ELECTORATE. GEISEL SAID THE LAW HAD FORCED CANDIDATES TO APPEAR FACE-TO-FACE TO THE PUBLIC IN RALLIES, AND HAD GIVEN THE VOTERS A MUCH BETTER OPPORTUNITY TO SIZE UP THE CANDIDATES. IN SUMMING UP THE ELECTIONS, HE SAID "WE HAVE BRILLIANTLY CONQUERED ONE MORE STAGE IN THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THE NATION", MEANING THAT PUBLIC AND CANDIDATES HAD ENTHUSIASTICALLY PARTICIPATED IN AN ORDERLY ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

17. GEISEL EXPLAINED HIS LOSS OF THE BIG CITIES OBLIQUELY: "THE CONTACT BETWEEN CANDIDATES AND THE ELECTORATE FACE-TO-FACE...ANIMATED THE CAMPAIGN... PERMITTING GREAT LEGITIMACY OF CHOICE. THE SAME THING

CERTAINLY DID NOT OCCUR IN THE GREAT POPULATION CENTERS,
WHERE THE DOMINANT INFLUENCE OF OTHER (UNSPECIFIED)
IMPULSES, FUNDAMENTALLY LESS LEGITIMATE.. WAS MAKING
ITSELF FELT. IT IS STRANGE IN THE FACE OF THIS
REALITY THAT GREATER SIGNIFICANCE
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PAGE 04 BRASIL 10655 02 OF 03 031039Z

AND AUTHENTICITY ARE ATTRIBUTED TO THE VOTE IN THE CAPITALS
AND THE LARGE URBAN CENTERS."

18. GEISEL CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT THE RESULTS OF
THE ELECTIONS WERE BEING CAREFULLY STUDIED AND ANALYZED,
WHICH IS A GOOD SIGN OF THE INCREASING POLITICAL SOPHISTI-
CATION OF THE COUNTRY. HE BELIEVED WITHOUT ANY DOUBT,
HOWEVER, THAT THE ELECTIONS REPRESENTED "A CLEAR AND
UNQUESTIONABLE EXPRESSION BY A GREAT MAJORITY OF THE
BRAZILIAN PEOPLE" IN FAVOR OF HIS GOVERNMENT.
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PAGE 01 BRASIL 10655 03 OF 03 031046Z
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 ERDA-05 /101 W

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P R 302300Z DEC 76
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 BRASILIA 10655

19. COMMENT. STIFF AND FORCEFUL IN DELIVERY, THE ADDRESS WAS PEDESTRIAN, EVEN IN COMPARISON WITH GEISEL'S YEAR-END ADDRESSES IN 1974 AND 1975. THE ADDRESS REVEALED A LACK OF IMAGINATIVE VISION, PHILOSOPHY, INTROSPECTION AND NEW IDEAS, AND IT CONTAINED NO ANNOUNCEMENTS OF POLICY SHIFTS. LIKE THE HORSE IN "ANIMAL FARM", BRAZILIANS ARE ASKED TO BEAR GREATER SACRIFICES SILENTLY, AND NOT TO EXPECT RELIEF ANYTIME SOON. LESS CONFIDENT IN TONE THAN ITS PREDECESSORS, THIS YEAR'S ADDRESS MUSTERED ONLY MODEST
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BRASIL 10655 03 OF 03 031046Z

OPTIMISM -- LITTLE MORE THAN GEISEL'S JUDGEMENT THAT BRAZIL CAN OVERCOME ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES.

20. TWO CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ECONOMIC PORTION OF THE ADDRESS MERIT SPECIAL COMMENT.

(A) IN HIS LONG AND DULL QUOTES FROM PREVIOUS ADDRESSES, GEISEL APPARENTLY SOUGHT TO SHOW THAT HE HAD ANTICIPATED MOST OF THE PROBLEMS, AND HAD RESPONDED AS BEST HE COULD AT EACH TURN OF DEVELOPMENTS, BUT HE HAD BEEN HINDERED BY POOR ECONOMIC INDICATORS AND CRUDE POLICY INSTRUMENTS. THESE HINDRANCES, IN OUR JUDGEMENT, CAUSED FEWER ECONOMIC POLICY ERRORS THAN DID UNCOORDINATED POLICY-MAKING AND POOR JUDGEMENT. FOR INSTANCE, JUDGEMENTAL FACTORS HAVE DETERMINED THE POLICIES OF EXCHANGE RATE OVERVALUATION, EXCESSIVE FLUCTUATION IN MONETARY GROWTH, AND INCREASINGLY STIFLING LOCAL CONTENT REQUIREMENTS. WE DOUBT THAT GEISEL'S DEFENSIVE APOLOGIA WILL PERSUADE THE GROWING NUMBER OF OBSERVERS WHO SEE BRAZILIAN ECONOMIC POLICY AS LACKING AGILITY AND AS FUMBLING AND UNCERTAIN IN CONCEPT.

(B) GEISEL'S ATTEMPT TO BLAME EXTERNAL DIFFICULTIES IS LESS CREDIBLE THIS YEAR THAN IT WAS IN 1975 (REFTEL). INTERNAL POLICIES CLEARLY CONSTITUTE MUCH OF THE PROBLEM, AND THE EXTERNAL SIDE WAS NOT SO UNFAVORABLE THIS YEAR -- THE PARTIAL WORLD RECOVERY HELPED BRAZIL'S EXPORTS, BRAZIL'S TERMS-OF-TRADE SEEM TO HAVE IMPROVED, AND ITS FOREIGN BORROWING CONTINUED UNABATED. IN SPITE OF THIS, BRAZIL'S CURRENT ACCOUNT DEFICIT FOR 1976 WILL BE ON THE ORDER OF SIX BILLION DOLLARS. THE IMPLICATIONS OF SUCH CURRENT ACCOUNT DEFICIT FOR BRAZIL'S FOREIGN DEBT HAVE HELPED FEED AN

EXCITED PUBLIC DEBATE ABOUT BRAZIL'S "ECONOMIC MODEL", I.E.,
TOO MUCH EXTERNAL DEPENDENCE OR NOT. GEISEL AVOIDED THIS
TOPIC, APPARENTLY LEAVING IT TO HIS MINISTERS TO DEBATE --
THE FINANCE AND PLANNING MINISTERS VERSUS INDUSTRY AND
COMMERCE MINISTER GOMES, AN OUTSPOKEN CRITIC OF THE MODEL
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BRASIL 10655 03 OF 03 031046Z

20. THE POLITICAL CONTENT OF SPEECH IS NOTEWORTHY FOR THE
WAY IN WHICH GEISEL PASSED OFF ARENA'S DEFEAT IN CITIES.
HE VIRTUALLY IGNORED THE FACTORS WHICH HAD DRIVEN THE URBAN
MAJORITY TO MOVE INTO OPPOSITION. HIS FAILURE TO SPEAK TO
THIS ISSUE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY PROMPT REACTION FROM NATION'S
EDITORIALISTS IN COMING WEEKS. ALTHOUGH GEISEL INTERPRETED
ARENA'S WIN AS A POPULAR MANDATE FOR HIS GOVERNMENT, HE
LEFT UNSAID WHAT MANY BRAZILIANS LONGED TO HEAR: THAT HE
WOULD TONTINUE PROCESS OF DISTENSAO, THE FURTHER LOOSENING
UP OF THE BRAZILIAN POLITICAL PROCESS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESIDENT, ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, STATE OF THE UNION MESSAGE, SPEECHES, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 DEC 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ShawDG
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976BRASIL10655
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D770001-1004
From: BRASILIA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t1976122/aaaaabdztel
Line Count: 408
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 8
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BRASILIA 11073
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ShawDG
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 JUL 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <12 JUL 2004 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <22 OCT 2004 by ShawDG>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESIDENT GEISEL'S YEAR-END ADDRESS TO THE NATION
TAGS: ECON, PINT, BR, (GEISEL, ERNESTO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006